



NEWS RELEASE

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State Health Department Receives Smallpox Vaccine

BISMARCK, N.D. – The North Dakota Department of Health has received delivery of 1,600 doses of smallpox vaccine from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The vaccine will be used in implementation of Phase I of the National Smallpox Vaccination Program, according to State Health Officer Terry Dwelle, M.D.

In the coming weeks, the vaccine will be provided to volunteer health care personnel as part of the state's ongoing emergency preparedness efforts.

“Without a known threat of smallpox, the vaccine is not recommended for the general public at this time,” Dwelle said. “By protecting those people who would be initially called upon to respond, we further strengthen our ability to respond to a smallpox outbreak and to protect the health of the public.”

During Phase I of the Smallpox Vaccination Program, the volunteer health care providers receiving the vaccine will include public health response teams throughout North Dakota and designated team members from participating hospitals. If an actual smallpox outbreak should occur, the health care staff vaccinated in Phase I would respond by providing vaccine, investigating potential cases or providing care to those infected. Phase II, which will begin sometime after Phase I is completed, is expected to include offering the smallpox vaccine to other health care providers and first responders.

In preparation for implementation of the Smallpox Vaccination Program, the Department of Health has conducted informational seminars for the media, physicians, hospitals and first responders through live video streaming on its website. Archived copies of the seminars are available for viewing at www.health.state.nd.us/smallpox/. Several additional seminars are planned, as well. In addition five public health nurses from across the state attended training for smallpox vaccination administration offered by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, Ga., and two state public health staff members attended training about data management and clinical assessment of adverse reactions to the vaccine.

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Smallpox is a serious, contagious and sometimes fatal disease caused by the variola virus, which emerged in human populations thousands of years ago. About 30 percent of people who contract the disease will die. The last case of smallpox in the United States occurred in 1949, and the last natural case in the world occurred in Somalia in 1977. Routine smallpox vaccinations in the U.S. ended in 1972.

“This is the same vaccine that was used to eliminate the disease of smallpox in humans around the world,” Dwelle said. “It makes sense to immunize select volunteer health care personnel who will be prepared to respond as disease detectives in investigating possible cases or to provide care to those infected. Having this initial workforce protected will make it much easier to protect the health of every North Dakotan in the event of an actual smallpox outbreak.”

For more information, contact Tim Wiedrich, director of the Department of Health’s Bioterrorism Preparedness and Response Program, at 701.328.2270.

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Please note:

- *The CDC’s public response hotline is available to answer questions about smallpox. The public can call 1.888.246.2675 (English); 1.866.874.2646 (hearing impaired); or 1.888.246.2857 (Spanish).*
- *A fact sheet explaining the three-phase smallpox vaccination plan is attached.*
- *More information about smallpox is available on the following websites:*
 - *North Dakota Department of Health – www.health.state.nd.us/smallpox*
 - *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – www.cdc.gov*
 - *United States Department of Health and Human Services – www.hhs.gov*